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ABSTRACT

This report reviews and analyzes programs to educate homeless children and youth. A look at the national perspective describes the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, its passage and content. The paper argues that the Department of Education, charged with implementing the Act, failed to do so. Delays, inadequate monitoring, and failure to provide any guidance to the states severely undermined the program. Amendments to the Act that are designed to address these problems are described, and they included tightened monitoring requirements, mandated provision of technical assistance, and express permission for the use of funds for educational services. The report notes the Department of Education's continued non-compliance, and Bush Administration efforts to eliminate the program. A further section of the report describes efforts in the District of Columbia to work with government officials to translate local homeless children's needs into services, particularly transportation service. Five appendixes contain sections of the federal legislation amendments, new provisions for the state plan required by the amendments, a list of community groups involved in the D.C. transportation plan, personal statements from homeless persons, and statements of those benefiting from the transportation plan. (JB)

NATIONAL LAW CENTER
ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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SMALL STEPS:
An Update on the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program

A Report by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty

July 1991

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* * *

Lorraine Friedman is the principal author of this report. Portions were written by Maria Foscarinis, who edited the report.

Executive Summary

According to the Department of Education ("DOE"), 450,000 children are homeless nationwide. And according to DOE, 28% of these children are denied access to public education. Residency requirements, inability to obtain school records and lack of transportation literally shut these children out of school.

Without access to school, homeless children are virtually doomed to failure. Without access to school, homeless children face increased instability and emotional trauma. And without access to school, homeless children are unable to acquire the basic skills necessary to give them a fighting chance of becoming productive -- and employed -- adults.

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, passed in 1987, addressed this problem for the first time. The Act guaranteed homeless children the right to attend public school, created a detailed set of requirements to ensure practical implementation of this right, and authorized federal monies to fund fifty state "coordinators" to administer the program in each state. Nevertheless, DOE, charged with implementing the program, failed to do so. Delays, inadequate monitoring and failure to provide any guidance to the states severely undermined the program. In addition, DOE interpreted the statute to prohibit use of funds to actually educate homeless children: funds could be used for administrative purposes only.

On November 29, 1990, Congress passed amendments to the Act designed to address some of these problems. The amendments tightened monitoring requirements, mandated the provision of technical assistance, and expressly permitted the use of funds for direct educational services. In addition, the amendments tightened requirements on the states, specifically requiring the elimination of all barriers to education, including a lack of transportation, and mandating coordination with other social services.

The amendments increased the program's authorization from $7 million to $50 million. This includes a new grant program to provide funds to local educational agencies for direct educational services to homeless children. Eligible activities include tutoring, referrals for medical and mental health services, before and after school care programs, pre-school programs and counseling.

While these improvements are a significant step towards addressing problems with the program, much more remains to be done. Of the $50 million authorized for FY 91, only $7.2 million was actually appropriated. For FY 92, $50 million was authorized, but to date only $37 million has been appropriated.

At the same time, leadership from the White House is sorely lacking. In his 1991 proposed budget, President Bush proposed the virtual elimination of the program. The Administration -- led by the would-be "Education President" -- has made clear that the education of homeless children is not a priority.

Lack of leadership at the federal level has been translated into inadequate implementation at the local level as well. Last summer, the National Law Center conducted an investigation of the implementation of the federal law at the local level. Focusing on the District of Columbia, the Law Center interviewed residents of family shelters, service providers and government officials. In a September 1990 report, Stuck at the Shelter, the Law Center found that over half of homeless families interviewed reported that their children regularly missed school. Lack of transportation was the primary barrier to access.

Over the past year, the Law Center, together with a coalition of groups -- including shelter providers, community groups and religious organizations -- sought to redress this problem. Using the McKinney Act provisions as its basic framework, the coalition formed a list of demands designed to assure transportation to school for homeless children. After a series of meetings with local government officials, including the D.C. Superintendent of Schools and School Board members, the coalition began an intensive effort to translate these demands into reality. After four months of negotiations, the coalition won a significant victory: the District began providing school bus transportation to the Budget Inn, the largest family shelter in the city.

Statements taken from homeless parents and children living at the Budget Inn attest to the difference transportation has made: these children now enjoy regular, safe access to school. In addition, they are able to take advantage of school breakfast and after-school programs. The buses have made a major difference in their lives.

However, much remains to be done at the local level as well. Currently, only the Budget Inn is served by school buses. Twenty family shelters remain without transportation. Statements of parents and children at the shelters illustrate the terrible hardship this deprivation imposes.

Over the past year, small steps towards progress were made, but large strides are needed.

SMALL STEPS:
An Update on the Education
of Homeless Children and Youth Program

I. Introduction

As poverty and homelessness have continued to rise in our country, perhaps the most disconcerting statistic is that homeless families with children account for approximately one-third of the entire homeless population. [1] The Department of Education (DOE) estimates there are currently 450,000 homeless children in the country. [2] Advocates estimate the number of homeless children and youth ranges between 500,000- 750,000. While the numbers are troublesome, it is the impact of homelessness on young children that is the true horror.

Homelessness affects virtually every aspect of children's lives. In a 1990 report, the federal Interagency Council on the Homeless echoed this sentiment stating that "no aspect of the tragedy of homelessness is worse than its effect on children." Studies indicate that homeless children often suffer an increased risk of health problems, nutritional deficiencies, eating and sleeping problems, psychological problems such as depression, anxiety and withdrawal, and often family problems. [3]

Additionally, many positive factors that other children take for granted are sorely missing from the lives of homeless children. Perhaps one of the most important missing factors is stability. Socio-economic hardships are endemic to this population. And, precarious housing creates a pattern of instability that is a constant factor in the lives of these children.

Homeless children, whose lives are steeped in hardship, transition and change, desperately need some place to feel comfortable, to give them the reassurance that the rest of their lives can not offer. Homeless children need the stability and sense of belonging that schools can provide.

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1 United States Conference of Mayors, A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities:1990 A 30 City Survey, p. 25 (December 1990).

2 1989 Report on Department of Education Activities (Section 724(b)(2) of P.L. 100-77) and 1989 Status Report on Education of Homeless Children and Youth from State Coordinators (Section 724(b)(3) of P.L. 100-77) (March 1990).

3 Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., Learning in Limbo: The Educational Deprivation of Homeless Children (September 1989).

No one can deny the importance of education in children's lives. It is the foundation for a future, the necessary prerequisite to productive employment. Education gives children a sense of worth; it empowers them to take positive steps for themselves. A comprehensive education opens doors to many opportunities which would otherwise be out of reach.

However, the unstable educational situation of homeless children is one of the most serious problems they must face. Without an education, these children are condemned to continue their downward cycle of poverty and homelessness.

Homeless children face many obstacles in trying to get a public education. Barriers include residency, guardianship and immunization requirements, an inability to obtain school records, and a lack of comparable services. [4] Unfortunately, the educational problems of homeless children do not end with these impediments to access. Other barriers, such as lack of transportation, also result in low attendance rates. In their 1989 report, DOE estimated that 28% of homeless school age children do not attend school regularly. [5] Advocates estimate that up to 50% of all homeless children are not attending school. [6]

Being deprived of an education can adversely affect any child. Sadly, the children in greatest need of an education are those least able to obtain one. The difference is no small matter; it could be the difference of preventing a homeless child from becoming a homeless adult. This report outlines the recent actions that have been taken to solve this problem. However, to actually move forward, we need "long strides" instead of "small steps."

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4 See e.g., National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, Shut Out: Denial of Education to Homeless Children (May 1990).

5 1989 DOE Report, Table 3.

6 See, e.g., Child Welfare League of America, Homeless Children and Their Families: A Preliminary Study, p.2 (1987).

II. The National View

A. The McKinney Act

The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, originally introduced as the Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act, was never meant to be comprehensive legislation. Rather, advocates viewed it as a first step. With the passage of this landmark legislation, the federal government was forced to acknowledge that homelessness in this country had risen to crisis proportion. The Act focused on short-term solutions to alleviate immediate problems. Additional legislation was greatly needed to further aid the nation's poor.

The original Title VII B, the Education for Homeless Children and Youth provision, attempted to integrate homeless children into already existing school programs -- rather than segregate them in new programs of their own. Three years later, November 29, 1990, Title VII B was reauthorized. The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Amendments Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-645) significantly added to the original Act.

One of the greatest impacts of homelessness on children is that it uproots them from their homes, schools, and everything familiar. Residency requirements, which state that children are unable to attend a school in a district where they do not reside, may keep homeless children out of school. When a homeless family is forced to move due to becoming homeless, they often cross school district lines. A child may be forced out of one district and be unable to transfer to a school in the new district because her family has not established permanent residency there.

As originally written, Title VII B set forth a policy statement to ensure that all homeless children and youth had "access to a free, appropriate public education." Section 722 provided grants for state activities for the education of homeless children and youth. The authorized activities included the designation of a state coordinator whose job it was to formulate a plan to carry out the policies set forth in the Act. The coordinator was also responsible for counting the number of homeless children and youth within the state.

The original state plans were required to contain the following key provisions: (1) a mandate that local educational agencies (LEAs) should either continue a child's education in the school district of origin for the remainder of the school year or enroll the child in the school district in which he or she now resides, whichever is in the child's best interest; (2) a provision for homeless children to receive services comparable to those received by all other children; and (3) a requirement that school records be promptly made available to homeless children changing schools.

The original Title VII B also contained a program to provide funds for "exemplary programs that successfully address the needs of homeless students." Finally, the legislation made DOE responsible for monitoring and reviewing compliance with the Act and preparing reports for Congress on the program and its activities.

B. Implementation Problems

For the first few years, the program experienced difficulties getting started. In December of 1987, the Department of Education, the agency charged with implementing the program, was sued for their inability to distribute federal monies to the states in a timely fashion. Last year, DOE was still one year behind schedule. DOE's only response to this critical problem was to ask states to spend money for two years concurrently in one funding period.

DOE also had problems monitoring the states' activities and giving guidance when the states needed assistance interpreting the new program. The Government Accounting Office (GAO) found that as of May 1990, DOE had not monitored any states receiving McKinney funds since the program's inception. [7] In a recent report, The Center for Law and Education cites that "[a]s of October 1990 ED (DOE) had visited three states and had plans, according to ED, for on-site visits to an additional 30 to 35 states during FY 1991." [8] However, according to the December 1990 GAO report, the number of visits will be reduced unless DOE staff levels increase. [9]

Another example of DOE's poor administration of the program was their interpretation of the statute to prohibit use of McKinney funds for any direct services to actually educate homeless children. As a result, states used funds solely for administrative purposes.

Initially, the coordinators submitted state plans, which explained how their state would meet the educational needs of homeless children and youth. The coordinators also conducted a yearly count of homeless children and youth in their states. Nevertheless, in many cases, state plans were not actually implemented and access to education was not guaranteed. Even where access was provided, additional services were needed to truly assist this underprivileged population.

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7 Center for Law and Education, Supplement to Materials on the Education of Homeless Children, p.2 (May 1991).

8 Id.

9 Id.

In addition, the accuracy of the annual count was questionable without the guidelines to ensure nationwide uniformity of the results. The coordinators did not feel qualified to do the count and arrive at a reliable number. Some states took a one day count, others did a year long count and others extrapolated the number from the number of shelters in the states and residents living in the shelters at the time. Due to the different methodologies used and inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the final figures, the count could not be relied upon as the definitive number of homeless children in the country.

Frustrated with a lack of guidance on the part of DOE, the coordinators formed their own organization, the National Association of State Coordinators for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NASCEHCY). This group provides a forum for the coordinators to exchange ideas and to create a united voice to influence DOE. In their recent position paper, the Association stated that even

> [w]ith few resources and a weak legislative mandate, state departments of education, have begun to make a difference. Today, with the promise of greater resources and a much stronger reauthorization, there is substantial reason to believe that state departments of education, in cooperation with school districts and social service agencies, can continue to make an important difference in the lives of homeless children and youth. The nation has reason to be hopeful, but there is not reason to be satisfied. [10]

At the March 1991 Conference of State Coordinators for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, DOE proposed three concepts to be incorporated into the amendments: (1) the need to coordinate services; (2) the goal of no isolation or stigmatization of homeless children; and (3) the heightened awareness of personnel of the special needs of homeless children. They stressed that existing educational programs could serve the homeless population, but that better coordination was needed to get them the services they deserve and to which they are entitled.

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10 National Association of State Coordinators for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Homeless, Not Hopeless: Educational Opportunity for America's Homeless Children and Youth, p.4 (April 1991).

C. The 1990 Amendments

Congress responded to the implementation problems identified by advocates and coordinators with the passage of the 1990 McKinney Amendments. Originally, the Act's statement of policy consisted of assurances that homeless children and youth would have access to free, appropriate public education and that the states would review and revise all residency requirements to ensure such access. The new amendments expanded Title VII B's statement of policy to include the review and revision of all "laws, regulations, practices or policies that may act as a barrier to the enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and homeless youth."

Congress also explicitly stated that homeless children should be integrated into mainstream educational programs rather than be placed in new programs created to serve them. Also, the "best interest" standard was revised to allow children to continue their education in the same school, as opposed to school district, even if they become homeless during the summer. Other policy changes included changing the annual count to a biennial count [11], allowing direct services for homeless children, and eliminating the exemplary program. (For a complete list of policy changes, see Appendix 1.)

The state plan requirements were expanded under Sec. 722(e) to include such programs as heightened awareness for school personnel, before and after school programs, coordination between LEAs and other agencies serving homeless children and youth, and special liaisons to provide for the needs of homeless children and youth. Congress stressed that not only must all barriers to access be eliminated but also that states must do do everything possible to promote homeless children's success in school. (For a complete list of new provisions added to the state plan see Appendix 2.)

The coordinators' duties originally included gathering data on the number of homeless children and youth, developing and carrying out the state plan, and reporting to DOE on progress and problems. Sec. 722(d) expands the duties of the coordinators, which now include facilitating coordination between the SEAs, the State social services agency, and other agencies providing services to homeless children and youth and their families. The coordinators are also charged with eliminating all barriers which prevent homeless children from receiving an education and succeeding in school.

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11 In their May 6, 1991 Memorandum to State Coordinators for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, DOE undermines the goal of uniformity of results by permitting states that completed counts during calendar year 1990 to submit that data to meet the 1991 count requirement.

One major barrier cited in the amendments is transportation. If homeless children are unable to get to school, their federally protected right to receive a free, public education is worthless. Since the amendments give a homeless child the right to either continue his or her education at the school of origin or attend the school nearest his or her shelter, that right is violated each time a homeless child can not get to school. The amendments make clear that the state is responsible for eliminating transportation barriers -- not the homeless parent.

Under Sec. 724(b), the Department of Education also has additional responsibilities, including:

- monitoring state plans to ensure that state laws, practices and policies adequately address the problems regarding homeless children and youth.
- conducting a study to determine the best way to locate, identify, and count homeless children and youth.
- providing support and technical assistance to state educational agencies to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities under this title.

The amendments are a positive step for this program. They expand the reach of the program; they permit direct services; they stress coordination with other programs to assist homeless children; they strengthen Title VII B. However, problems persist both with the amendments and with DOE's administration of the program.

Section 723(b)(1) answers the debate about direct services by specifically providing for a wide range of educational and support services for homeless children. Whereas previously DOE limited services to pilot projects, the Act now makes explicit that states may provide grants to LEAs to provide direct services to homeless children to ensure their success in school. Examples of potential services include: referrals for medical and mental health services, assistance in defraying transportation costs, preschool programs, before and after school programs, parent educational programs, counseling and other services to assist homeless children and youth.

The direct services provision requires that at least 50% of LEA grants be used to provide remedial education, tutoring, and other educational services. And, Section 723(b)(2) requires that between 35 - 50% of LEA grants be spent on related services. These restrictions define how local school districts should spend their money. Some school districts may already have tutoring programs in place, but the Act mandates that 50 -65% of their money be used for that purpose rather than to meet the needs of that particular population. Advocates believe that LEAs should be allowed to distribute funds as they deem appropriate, by need not by mandate.

Many advocates were disappointed with the 50% requirement. The fundamental purpose of Title VII B is the integration of homeless children into already existing programs, without isolating them or stigmatizing them. But, this section has the potential of segregating homeless children for these remedial programs. Also, there is an implication that all homeless children need some type of remedial education, which is stigmatizing in and of itself.

Also, coordination with other programs is imperative, but stating it as a goal rather than explaining possible linkages seems an empty gesture. And, it is virtually impossible for the states to be expected to implement any of the new programs without a significant increase in funds. The amendments greatly increased the authorization for Title VII B programs from $7.5 million to $50 million. However, the program was only appropriated $7.2 million for FY91. Obviously, this low appropriation will impede the ability of the states to make make great strides. The changes made through the amendments <u>are</u> a step in the right direction, but only a step.

D. DOE's Continuing Non-compliance

In order for this program to succeed, DOE <u>must</u> comply with the McKinney Act. One year ago, the Law Center analyzed DOE's administration of Title VII B. The results were quite disturbing: the program was riddled with problems including delays in funding, inadequate and improper review of state plans, failure to properly monitor state activity, late reports to Congress, and problems with communication.

Advocates agree that although DOE has improved its administration of the program, problems still exist. Lisa Mihaly, of the Children's Defense Fund, says that the program "is hindered at the federal level by being so small (i.e., not enough money)...erratically monitored... and suffers from a lack of administration support and limited resources." She says that the lack of support filters down to the state level where the program is too low on the priority list, with resources and energy getting expended on larger programs.

Joan Alker, of the National Coalition for the Homeless, echoed her concerns and fears that many homeless children are still not attending school or receiving services they need. She believes these problems can be resolved "with more resources ... and a higher level of commitment from the Department of Education and the states." She feels that although the "thrust of the amendments is very promising, in order for them to be effective, we need Congress to appropriate the full $50 million."

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, who has championed the rights of homeless children and youth on Capitol Hill, agrees that more money is a must in order for the program to succeed. And, she adds that for the program to be successful, DOE must "ensure that states receive proper technical assistance and that each year's funding is distributed in a timely fashion." She also stresses the importance of transportation: "Unless these children can make it to their classroom door, they will never have the opportunity to receive the education to which they are entitled."

Likewise, the coordinators express mixed feelings about DOE. Peggy Jackson-Jobe, Maryland Coordinator and President of the NASCEHCY, says that there are still problems at the federal level with technical assistance. She complains that the coordinators need immediate feedback and that it "takes them (DOE) so long to get something out of that office in terms of communication and dissemination of information." In March, the coordinators requested guidance in writing from DOE regarding their state plans. They did not receive an answer until May, which was too late for many coordinators because the plans were due to DOE by May 30. Another problem she encounters is inconsistent responses to her questions from DOE officials. She explains her frustration: "two people in the same department should say the same thing -- right, wrong, or indifferent." Ms. Jackson-Jobe says that DOE's guidance and administration of the program is "better than it was, but not where it needs to be." She feels that the amendments will help because they add "some teeth to the program."

Cynthia Uline, Pennsylvania Coordinator, agrees that "nationally, I think we have a lot more work to do." She sees the main problem with this program as a lack of money and believes that the states need more money "to do what the law tells us we should do." And, DOE needs more money to increase their staff, thus increasing their ability to administer and monitor the program. Another coordinator agrees calling DOE "tragically understaffed." Donna Cunningham, Oregon Coordinator and Secretary of the NASCEHCY, adds that the "critical lack of funding affects all states, but the minimum grant states [those states receiving $50,000] are suffering the most." Her state can not even hire a full-time coordinator and has been negatively affected by the termination of the exemplary grants.

Bill Scheel, Arizona Coordinator and the NASCEHCY Treasurer, says the program has reached a certain "plateau of operation ... the first few years were spent scrambling, trying to figure out the need. Now, most states have a good feel for what is going on, and we have the flexibility to respond to the needs as we see them." As for DOE, Mr. Scheel says that he respects them as individuals, but "they have become irrelevant. As long as they tell us how to cross our 't's and dot our 'i's, all we really need is the money." He views the Amendments as overdue: "We can do counts and make assurances until the cows come home, but the real need is to deliver services." But, he sees problems in the amendments because of the "laundry list" style saying that "some things might be issues for some states but not for others."

Many coordinators believe that there have been significant accomplishments in the program. David Davidson, Georgia Coordinator, is one of them; however, he "continues to have a concern that we are a step-child to them (DOE)." He explains that the flow of information "just hasn't happened." An example of their lack of communication is that Mr. Davidson requested a copy of the amendments from DOE months ago and still has not received one. He also cites lack of monitoring as a problem. He sums up by saying: "I am not confident about their level of commitment and administration of this program." However, he thinks that the amendments will help because they clarify what the states should be doing. One problem in Georgia is that before and after-school programs are not free, and thus discriminate against homeless and low-income children who are unable to afford to participate.

When asked how she thought the program was running in its fifth year, Mary Jean LeTendra, Director of Compensatory Education at DOE, said that to make the program even stronger, the states must be more aggressive in changing their regulations and policies as well as in monitoring what is happening at the local level. She says there has been "tremendous progress in terms of state plans and leadership, in terms of commitment to these children." She would like to see the coordinators take advantage of opportunities that already exist, for example Chapter 1, a program for educationally deprived children. Overall, she says she is pleased with the progress that the program has made.

E. The Bush Administration's Effort to Eliminate the Program

The Administration's Budget proposal for FY 1992 caused quite a stir in the homeless advocates' community. The President proposed including funding for this education program, as well as other homeless assistance programs currently under Health and Human Services and Department of Labor, in the budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

By providing funding under HUD rather than the appropriate agencies, the Administration proposed to consolidate funding, which would have the "advantage of providing a single source of funding for projects encompassing a variety of needs." [12] The plan was to use the Supplemental Facilities To Assist the Homeless (SAFAH) program as the umbrella program for all the various consolidated programs. SAFAH was chosen because it "provides comprehensive assistance for particularly innovative programs or alternative methods of meeting the immediate and long-term needs of the homeless." [13]

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12 Budget of the United States Government Fiscal Year 1992, Part IV,p. 713 (1991).

13 Id.

Regarding the education program, the obvious problem is that it would cease to exist in its present form; the program would be discretionary. States would apply for a SAFAH grant and could choose the purpose for that money. Thus, while the requirement of providing access to free, public education would still be law, there would be no enforcement mechanism and many of the new provisions would be nullified. Also, HUD would be in charge of an education program, even though its expertise is in housing, not educational matters. Also, the program has been under the direction of DOE for the beginning years, their staff knows this program, knows the problems, knows the coordinators and should remain in charge while the program undergoes a transition period.

Pat Carlisle of the Interagency Council explained that by combining the programs, the current fragmentation would be eliminated. Likewise, Jim Forsberg of HUD echoed Ms. Carlisle and added that combining the programs would be better for the states because there would be a bigger pot of money to access. He said that the Administration "wants to stop experimenting." This was a strange notion since it is the Administration's idea to transfer a DOE program to HUD, a proposal quite experimental in nature.

The less obvious problem is that currently all states that apply for funding under Title VII B are granted at least the minimum amount of $50,000; under the new scheme states would have to compete for funding. Some states may not get any Title VII B funding at all. Also, funds would be allocated on a matching basis; currently states are not required to match federal monies. With its request to effectively eliminate Title VII B as we know it, the Administration -- led by the would-be "Education President" -- made clear that the education of homeless children and youth is not a priority.

Advocates, including the National Law Center, the National Coalition for the Homeless, the Children's Defense Fund and the Child Welfare League lobbied on Capitol Hill against the new budget proposal. The problem was resolved when the House subcommittee on education appropriated the full amount for the education program. The HUD subcommittee funded SAFAH at the full amount requested in the President's budget proposal, but made it clear that they were not including the education program in the programs SAFAH would cover. All agreed that transferring the program at this point would have been a mistake.

Currently, the House Appropriations Committee appropriated $37 million for Title VII of the McKinney Act, which includes Job Training and Adult Literacy programs, in addition to the Education program. The authorization was $50 million. During subcommittee mark-up of the appropriations bill, the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program was fully funded, but the Adult Literacy and Job Training programs were "zeroed out," receiving no money. The full House Appropriations Committee reduced the Education program to $37 million and gave $7.2 million to the Job Training program. The Adult Literacy program did not receive any money. The full House approved the appropriation bill. The Senate Appropriations Committee funded the Education program at $25 million, Job Training at $11.2 million and Adult Literacy at $9.8 million. The two appropriations bills will go to conference sometime this summer.

III. A Look at the District of Columbia

On the first day of the 1990-91 school year, the Law Center released a report, Stuck at the Shelter: Homeless Children and the D.C. School System. The report documented a lack of compliance with various McKinney Act provisions. Among the major problems was a lack of transportation. Of the 21 families interviewed, over half of the children were unable to attend school regularly due to transportation problems.

The report uncovered that homeless children were being denied access to a public education since they were unable to get to school. Part of the Act states that homeless children should be allowed to either continue their education in their "home school," the school they were attending before becoming homeless, or transfer to the school closest to the shelter in which they now reside, according to their "best interest." But, unless transportation to and from school is provided for these children, this right is virtually meaningless.

After the report was released, advocates around the city met to discuss the District's failure to comply with the McKinney Act by not providing transportation for these children. On September 17, 1990, outraged by the report's findings, the Mental Health Association of the District of Columbia convened a meeting to "call for united action to improve school attendance among homeless children in the District of Columbia." At the initial meeting, almost twenty groups were represented, including shelter providers, city officials, non-profit groups, community organizations, and religious groups (See Appendix 3).

The first action of the group involved a sign-on letter sent to the then Superintendent of D.C. Public Schools. The letter expressed the concern of twenty individuals that the "best interest" standard mandated under McKinney was nullified if homeless children were unable to get to school.

Although the goal was to obtain city-wide transportation, the group decided to focus on the Budget Inn, a family shelter precariously located near the intersection of one of the busiest streets in the city. The street provides access to Maryland, so in the mornings, it is frequented by commuters and quite dangerous for school children to try to cross on their way to school.

Being realistic, the group decided to ask for discounted tokens for families where bus routes could not begin immediately. In the District, tokens are distributed at school rather than at the shelters. The group proposed that the distribution take place at the shelters so that parents could keep track of tokens for their children. The group asked that free tokens be given to those families who could not afford the discounted price; otherwise, children in those families would be denied access to a free, public education as mandated by the Act.

The letter proposed the following three step plan to ensure access for these children as well as to address other critical issues pertaining to their education:

(1) Buses should be provided immediately for all shelters in the District, giving priority to the Budget Inn due to its dangerous location and the threat to the safety of the children living in that shelter.
(2) For families where tokens would provide appropriate assistance in getting homeless children to school, such tokens should be provided at a discount.
(3) Finally, free tokens should be given to children in need, children who otherwise would be unable to attend school.

The former Superintendent, Dr. Andrew Jenkins, responded by asking all interested parties to attend a meeting to discuss the transportation needs of the homeless students in the District. At that October 12, 1990 meeting, Dr. Jenkins agreed to take positive steps to see that a transportation plan was put into action for these children.

At the meeting he stated,"I'm very sensitive to the needs of the homeless population. If I had the resources, I'd do it right now because I support McKinney and the 'best interest of the child' test." Someone at the meeting mentioned that there were extra buses not currently being operated, but the District did not have extra drivers. Dr. Jenkins promised that if it was an issue of finding a driver to take the children to school, he would personally find one.

On October 16, 1990 the group met again with Jenkins and others to work on the logistics of the transportation plan. At that time, Dr. Jenkins promised to resolve several immediate concerns by taking the following steps:

(1) Designating a bus for the children at the Budget Inn. The estimated time for the bus to begin operation was 2-3 weeks.
(2) Locating $5,000-10,000 immediately to be used for bus tokens.
(3) Requesting funds in the FY1992 budget to ensure school transportation for homeless children.

Due to these assurances, the Law Center did not pursue other avenues to ensure compliance with federal law. However, the day before the scheduled implementation of the transportation plan, the Subcommittee on Special Populations of the Board of Education met to discuss its role in the project. Committee members wanted to determine whether or not liability could be created by the provision of services to the Budget Inn, in that other homeless children were not being similarly transported. The Board also noted that only two mini-buses were provided, with one bus having to make two trips. Those on the first route would arrive at school over an hour early. The Board stated that the project was premature due to the fact that there were no arrangements made for those children who would be dropped off at school early.

Advocates saw different problems arising from the plan to use two mini-buses which only seat sixteen children. Dropping off some children early could stigmatize those children; no other children were at school before 8:00 a.m. Also, the children had to wait over half an hour to eat breakfast, just sitting in the school cafeteria. However, the School Board was most concerned that if they were providing transportation to one group of homeless children, they could be found liable for not providing similar services to all homeless children. Due to many unresolved issues, the Board canceled the project start date (11/5/90) until they could convene a meeting to discuss the policy issues involved.

While the Board was working out the details of the plan, a tragedy occurred which gave a face and name to the transportation crisis: Aubrey Powell, a thirteen year old homeless child, was hit by a car on the long and dangerous trip home from school.

When Aubrey's family became homeless, they were assigned to the Budget Inn, a shelter six miles away from his "home school." While there were vacancies in other shelters closer to the school he was attending, this was not considered when the placement determination was made. To get to his school, Aubrey had to take two or three buses, depending on which route he was taking. Transportation to school took over an hour each day. Some nights, his younger brother would stay at his Aunt's house because he was too tired to ride the bus home.

The accident occurred at what the American Auto Association has found to be the most dangerous intersection in the city, the intersection of Bladensburg Road and New York Avenue, while Aubrey was walking from a Metro bus back to the shelter. Had the transportation plan been implemented, Aubrey would not have had to suffer a broken thigh, traction for one month, a four month hospital stay and an uncertain long-term recovery.

After being postponed for over two months, the transportation plan started on January 29, 1991, four months after the original community meetings were held. One of the two buses makes two trips to the Budget Inn to pick up children. For those children who are dropped off first, arrangements were made for them to have their breakfast served earlier, and a monitor was assigned to ride the bus with the children to assist with any problems.

The Board implemented the plan as a "pilot project" to allow for the evaluation of the limited plan before expanding it citywide and to attempt to remedy any possible liability problem. The Law Center agrees with Anita Shelton, Director of the Mental Health Association of the District of Columbia, who expressed her excitement about the prospect of expanding the program to other shelters "to provide support for much-needed services." The Board will evaluate the pilot to the Budget Inn at the end of the 1990-91 school year to determine whether to continue it, expand the plan to other shelters or to terminate the plan all together. What will happen remains to be seen.

Although a first step has been taken to provide transportation to one group of homeless children, other less fortunate children can not get to school due to lack of money to take public transportation. We have included, as an appendix to this report, statements gathered during the spring semester 1991 which serve to illustrate some of the barriers which continue to rob homeless children of a public education (See Appendix 4) as well as statements from children and parents at the Budget Inn who are benefiting from the transportation plan (See Appendix 5).

IV. Conclusion

In the Conference Report for the amendments to Title VII B, Senator Kennedy stated, "I believe that this piece of legislation is one of the most important ones that we will pass this session." Nothing could be more important than the future of today's youth, and nothing ensures their future like education.

Homeless children are still being denied an education. Their situation blatantly represents the neglect that our government has shown towards alleviating the problem of homelessness in our country. Education is critical to these children, whose lives are replete with hardship and change. They desperately need the secure environment that schools can provide. Only through education can we ensure a chance to break their cycle of homelessness.

The 1990 McKinney Amendments provide additional opportunities to ensure the successful education of homeless children. They expand responsibilities of the states, the coordinators, and the Department of Education. And, the amendments explicitly state that direct services should be provided to homeless children.

One way to implement the Act is by providing transportation to and from school. Currently, homeless children are still unable to get to school. If parents are unable to pay for transportation, or in other ways unable to get their children to school, homeless children are being denied "access to a free, public education" as mandated by the Act. By providing transportation, such access is ensured.

The District of Columbia is now providing transportation to a group of homeless children who otherwise would not be able to attend school on a regular basis. Other states provide for transportation in their state plans. Now, with the passage of the new amendments, states must eliminate all barriers to receiving an education -- including transportation.

Each day that homeless children are sitting at shelters, unable to get to school, is another day they are being denied opportunities for a brighter future. It is another day that the system fails them. Clearly, too much is at risk. To secure tomorrow's future for these children, we must take affirmative steps <u>today</u>.

V. Recommendations

A. On the national level, the Law Center makes the following recommendations:

1) DOE should provide funds to the states in a timely manner. All requests for information should be answered promptly to ensure that the states are better able to carry out the Act. Also, monitoring efforts should be greatly intensified to ensure that the states are complying with the Act and the new amendments.

2) States should work to remove all barriers that prevent homeless children from receiving an education. States should also begin implementation of the amendments by providing, among other things, both direct services and transportation to homeless children. States should also designate a liaison to help homeless children succeed in school.

B. For the District of Columbia, the Law Center makes the following recommendations:

1) The District should expand its transportation plan to include all shelters and welfare motels. While the plan is being developed, tokens should be available for all homeless children to get to and from school.

2) The D.C. Coordinator should ensure that all LEAs that receive money under this title designate a liaison to assist homeless children with any problems they might be experiencing.

3) The District should ensure that the "best interest" of the child standard is being employed when making the determination of which school a homeless child will attend.

4) The District should designate someone to work with the local Office of Emergency Shelter and Support Service to consider the child's "home school" when making shelter placement determinations.

APPENDIX 1

The following is a comparison of the major policy changes made by the new amendments with the provisions of the original Act:

1) Original: Required the revision of residency requirements to assure that homeless children and youth are afforded free and appropriate public education.
Amendments: Sec. 721(2) expanded this requirement to include all laws, regulations, practices or policies that may act as barriers to enrollment, attendance or success in school of homeless children and youth.

2) Original: Non-regulatory Guidance, DOE's interpretation of the Act, specifically stated that McKinney funding could not be used to provide direct services to homeless children and youth.
Amendments: Under Sec.722(c), direct services are authorized.

3) Original: State educational agencies (SEAs) were required to award grants to local educational agencies (LEAs).
Amendments: Under Sec. 722(c)(6), if a state receives more funds than it did in FY 1990, it must make awards to LEAs; otherwise, grants to LEAs are discretionary.

4) Original: Annual count of the number of homeless children and youth.
Amendments: Sec. 722(d)(1) calls for biennial counts of the number of homeless children and youth.

5) Original: As part of the Act, 17 exemplary grants were awarded to innovative programs serving homeless children and youth.
Amendments: Elimination of the exemplary grant program.

6) Original: Grants were awarded at the state level.
Amendments: Under Sec. 723, grants are now available from the LEAs for the education of homeless children and youth. Direct services may be provided through any number of ways. There are fifteen suggested activities that may use 35-50% of the funding. The other 50-65% must specifically be used to provide educational services such as tutoring, and remedial education services.

APPENDIX 2

The state plan must have the following <u>new</u> provisions:

- establishment of programs to heighten awareness of school personnel
- participation in federal, state, and local food programs of children who meet the eligibility requirements.
- participation in before and after school programs for children who meet the eligibility requirements.
- consideration of problems caused by transportation issues and enrollment delays.
- revision or review by the SEAs and LEAs of policies that will eliminate the barriers to enrollment and will enable homeless children and youth to remain in schools.
- assurance that SEAs and LEAs adopt policies and practices to ensure that homeless children and youth are not stigmatized or isolated.
- expansion of procedures for placement in the best interest of the child.
- inclusion of transportation in "comparable services."
- expansion of the maintenance requirement to include all records belonging to homeless children specifically immunization records, academic records, birth certificates, guardianship records and evaluations for special services or programs.
- coordination between LEAs and other agencies or programs serving homeless children and youth.
- designation by LEAs receiving monies under this title of a liaison to provide for the needs of homeless children in their school.
- special consideration, when reviewing and revising state policies, of issues concerning transportation, requirements of immunization, residency, birth certificates, school records or other documents, and guardianship requirements.

APPENDIX 3

The following groups attended the September 17, 1990 meeting and represent the coalition of concerned community groups:

(1) Mental Health Association of the District of Columbia
(2) ConServe
(3) Good Shepherd Ministry to the Homeless
(4) Members of the D.C. Council
(5) National Coalition for the Homeless
(6) Project Northstar
(7) Washington Area Metropolitan Authority (METRO)
(8) Zest, Inc.
(9) Washington Urban League
(10) Transitional Living Center
(11) The Girl Scout Council (local and national)
(12) Community Partnership for Prevention of Homelessness
(13) Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless
(14) D.C. Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
(15) United Way
(16) D.C. Jewish Community Center
(17) D.C. Office of Emergency Shelter and Support Services
(18) Member of D.C. School Attendance
(19) National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty.

APPENDIX 4

STATEMENT OF EARLENE BARNS

I am a homeless mother of Ronald Chapman, a fourteen year old student at Friendship School.

On December 8, 1990, my grandmother told Ronald he could no longer live with her. I was living with a friend, but she did not have enough room for the two of us. That's when we became homeless.

Now, we live at the Best Western, a shelter in northwest Washington, D.C. but my son still attends the same school he did before becoming homeless. It is across the city in southeast D.C.

When I do not have the money to pay for my son to take the bus to school, he is not able to go to school. So far, I think that he has missed over a month of school due to the fact that I don't have the money to pay to get him there.

This doesn't seem fair to me. He wants to be in school and I want him to get an education, only I don't have the money to pay to get him there.

STATEMENT OF VITA CALLAHAN

The end of December 1990, I was evicted from my apartment in southeast Washington, D.C. At that time, I was assigned to go the General Scott Inn, a family shelter in northwest D.C.

My son, Jeremiah, is in the second grade at Garfield Elementary. Garfield is the school that he was attending before we became homeless.

Every day, I take him to school because he is too young to take public transportation by himself. It takes about 45 minutes to get there because we have to switch buses.

I think education is the most important thing in a child's life. That is why I buy two flash passes every time I get a public assistance check. I spend $28 every two weeks to get us to school and back. But, that's okay. Education is one thing that I don't mind spending my money on.

My son is an "A" student at Garfield, and I will do whatever it takes to keep him there.

I asked the school counselor about getting the discounted tokens, but he told me that since we live out of the district, we were not eligible. That makes no sense. If you are out of the district, you need the tokens the most. He told me that I should transfer Jeremiah to a school closer to the shelter.

I don't want to transfer my son to another school. Then he will just have to transfer again when they move us somewhere else. I don't think that is healthy for a young child. He has enough changes as it is without me causing him to make even more.

STATEMENT OF MARGARET CASH

On December 7, 1990, my mother asked us to leave her house. She could no longer afford to support me and my two children.

Both of my children, Erica age 11 and Ricky age 5, were attending Gage Eckington Elementary School, which is a few blocks away from my mother. They would walk to school every day.

Now, we live in the General Scott Inn, a family shelter in D.C. They still walk to school, but now it takes about 30-45 minutes to get there. I walk with them every day and spend the day with my mother. When school is over, I walk them home.

My children rarely miss school. They love it. All of their friends are there. Plus they are doing good; there is always the chance that if I make them switch schools, they will not do as well. They have enough to adjust to right now.

My children have been at the same school since they started to go to school. I want to keep them there, but it would sure make it easier on me if we had free tokens. It is especially hard to get them there when it is so cold out.

STATEMENT OF JANICE CHAMBERS

Until mid-November 1990, I was living with a friend in her apartment. However, it became too crowded. There were 12 of us living in a two bedroom apartment. She asked us to leave. Since that time, I have been at the Best Western Motel, a family shelter in northwest D.C.

My daughter TeKeyia is in the fourth grade at Ferebee-Hope Elementary School. She has attended school there since kindergarten. She is on the honor roll and has all "A"s.

I do not want her to change schools even though she has to take two different buses to get there. I take her on the bus every day. It costs about $35 a week to take her both ways. But, I think her continuing her education uninterrupted is the most important thing. She is happy there and I want her to stay there.

STATEMENT OF THERESA DASH

On December 19, 1990, I became homeless because it was too tough on my mother to have me and my son, Travis, stay with her any more.

My son is an 'A' average student at his school, so I want to keep him there. There are a lot of good teachers at that school and a lot of good learning. If I were to switch his schools, there is a good chance that his grades would fall. Plus, my mother lives close to that school, so if there is an emergency, she can go to school to check on Travis.

Travis hasn't missed that much school, only when it is really too cold to walk. We walk to school every day because I don't have the money to let him take the bus. It takes about half an hour to get to his school from the General Scott Inn where we are currently staying.

My son wants to be a judge. He has got goals set for himself. I want him to get an education so that he can reach his goals.

STATEMENT OF ESTER FORD

My fourteen year old daughter and I live at the Best Western Inn, a family shelter in D.C.

My daughter walks to school every day. I am pregnant now and unable to walk with her. I am scared to death for her to walk to school but I don't have the money for her to take a bus. Every day, she calls me to let me know that she got to school all right and to let me know that she is safe.

I think she should have a school bus to take her to and from school. That would be much better than me worrying if today is the day that something will happen to her.

STATEMENT OF DONETTE FRANKS

I have lived with my daughter at Family Living Center, a D.C. family shelter, for the past two months. Before that, I rented an apartment in southeast Washington, but was evicted.

My daughter goes to school at the school she was attending before we became homeless. She rides public transportation, and I worry every day about her riding the bus by herself, especially because she has to take two different buses to get there. However, I usually have to borrow the money to get her there, so I definitely don't have the extra money for me to go with her and see that she gets there safely.

My daughter has to leave the shelter at 7:30 to get to school on time. However, I am already gone because I take the bus to breakfast. I also don't like the fact that she misses breakfast because by the time she has transferred two buses, she misses the school breakfast, too.

My daughter is a very good student. She should be in the 9th grade but she excelled and is now taking 10th grade classes. I think it is really unfortunate for someone as smart as my daughter to have to struggle so much just to get to school. It doesn't seem fair. There should be a bus for her and all the other homeless children in the District that need help.

STATEMENT OF LENNETTE GILLIAN

I have been homeless since the first week in December 1990. I live at the General Scott Inn, a shelter for homeless families in northwest Washington, D.C.

My daughter, Natalie, will begin kindergarten at Garrison Elementary School. I foresee a problem getting her to school. I have a bad leg with no cartilage or ligaments and can not walk with her to school. As she is only five years old, I do not want her walking alone.

The other alternative is to go with her on the bus; however, I don't have the money for transportation every day. Either way I think that she will end up missing a lot of school.

I am scared that my daughter will not receive the education that I truly want her to have. A school bus that stops at our shelter would greatly help her.

STATEMENT OF MELINDA KINCAID

I am a single homeless parent with two children, Natasha, age nine, and Christopher, age five. Since November 27, 1990, when we were evicted from our apartment, we have lived in one small room at the Best Western Motel, a D.C. family shelter in northwest.

I have to take my children to school every day - that is six fares a day, about $5.10 every day. My children are too young to go on the public buses by themselves; the streets are too dangerous for that. But, I don't have the money to get them there every day.

They have missed several days because I don't have the money to get them to school. It's a mess having no money, and it's my kids that are really having to pay.

STATEMENT OF BARBARA PARKER

When I moved out of my boyfriend's apartment in October 1990, I became homeless. Since that time, I have lived at the General Scott Inn, a family shelter in northwest Washington, D.C.

My 13 year old son Darin is in the 6th grade at Brookline Elementary School in northeast D.C. When we were placed in a shelter, I wanted him to continue his education at Brookline. He knows everyone at his school and feels comfortable. Also, if he were to transfer to a new school, he might have to stay back a year.

I want him to have an education because I want him to get a good job. Right now, he has to miss about 5 or 6 times a month because I don't have money to get him to school. If we had tokens, he would go every day. That's just not fair.

STATEMENT OF SANDRA PRICE

On October 3, 1990, I was evicted from my apartment in southeast D.C. and assigned to the General Scott Inn. Later, I was moved to the Best Western, another family shelter in northwest Washington.

My son goes to school about 11 or 12 blocks from the shelter. He has no other way of getting to school than to walk. I don't have the money for him to take a bus.

Last week alone, he missed four days because it was too cold for him to walk. Even though education means the world to me, I will not let him catch his death walking to school.

First we lost our home and had to move to one shelter. Then, they moved us to another. There is no way I am going to make my son switch schools on top of all the other adjustments that he has had to make. That would not be right. He has had enough change without having to change schools and friends, too.

STATEMENT OF PAULETTE REDMAN

I stay in a small room at the Family Living Center with my sons Antionne, age eleven, and Ebony, age ten. We became homeless because my mother didn't have room in her apartment for the three of us. We had been living there for three years, and it had become a hardship on her.

My children both attend Syphax Elementary School in southwest D.C. That is the school that they attended before we became homeless.

I work for the D.C. Department of Recreation. We all leave the shelter by 6:00 a.m. so that I can be at work on time. My kids come with me to work until it is time for them to go to school. Then, they just walk to school from the place where I work.

It was important to me that I not transfer my kids out of their school. They are doing well there, and school is very important to me. I want them to become somebody and not live on the streets or in a shelter. I don't want them to have to transfer in the middle of the school year; they've been through enough changes.

STATEMENT OF NADINE ROBINSON

Until mid-December, I lived with my sister in her apartment. But, she decided to move out to Maryland and get a one-bedroom apartment because living in D.C. was getting too expensive. After that, we became homeless and were placed at the General Scott Inn, a family shelter in northwest D.C.

My son, Andrew Harris, attends Douglas Jr. High School in southeast D.C. He is in the eighth grade there. However, ever since we moved to the shelter, he has had to miss at least 2-3 days a week.

I want to keep him in his old school where he is comfortable. He has gone there a long time and knows all the teachers and has friends there.

When I don't have money to get him to school, I borrow money from my mother or sister or else, he can't go. I think that we should be helped out. He deserves to get to go to school.

STATEMENT OF DEBORAH TATE

My son and I stay at the Braxton Inn, a family shelter in northwest D.C. We have been there about two months.

Bernard is 13 years old and in the eighth grade at Jefferson Jr. High School in southwest D.C. He does good at school there and I want to keep him in that school.

I have to beg to get money to pay for his bus fare to get to school. When I told Mr. Brown, a city social worker, that I needed tokens, he told me to transfer my child to a school closer to the shelter.

I don't think that I should have to transfer Bernard. We are living in a shelter. They could move me to a different shelter over night, and then what? I'm supposed to transfer him again? That doesn't make sense. He shouldn't have to keep switching schools; it is bad enough that he should have to switch homes.

STATEMENT OF ANGELA WHITAKER

I am a nineteen year old single parent of 16 month old Andre Whitaker. My baby and I lived with my mother until October 1990 when she asked us to leave. Since that time, we have stayed at the General Scott Inn, a family shelter in northwest Washington D.C.

I desperately need tokens or help getting to school. I go to Dunbar High School, but it is really far from my shelter. Two to three times a week, I have to miss school because I don't have the money to get there.

There is a day care center at my school, so I can take Andre there. I really want an education. I went back to school after I had my baby. I need an education to get a good job to be able to care for my son. If I keep missing school, I will never graduate. I really need help getting to school.

STATEMENT OF ANNETTE WHITE

Since I became homeless last month, I have lived at Family Living Center with my two children.

Both my children attend J.C. Knoll School, which was the neighborhood school they attended before we became homeless. However, they can no longer walk to school.

They have to take three different buses to get to school each day. I want them to continue their education at their old school because they are familiar with it and know all the teachers and friends there. They have enough changes in their lives without having to change to a new school, too.

Often, I can not afford to pay for their transportation to and from school and they are not able to go. If we had tokens or a bus to pick them up, it would be a lot easier on me and they would get to go to school every day.

APPENDIX 5

The following statements were taken from parents and children at the Budget Inn, the family shelter with the transportation pilot project:

- Rhonda Jones is a nine year who attends Hendley Elementary School in southeast Washington. Her mother, Denise, likes that a bus picks up her daughter and adds, "it's nice that I don't have to pay to get her to school." Finding money to pay for Rhonda's bus fare often causes problems. Rhonda says that she likes that a bus comes to get her everyday because it means she can go to school everyday.

- Teresa Morris says that she is thrilled that there is a bus to take her daughter, Threshon, to school. Ms. Morris works until 5:00 and would often get home after her nine year old daughter. Neither of them liked the situation, but it particularly bothered Ms. Morris who worried that something might happen to Threshon when she was not home. Now, with the bus plan, Ms. Morris says, "It is a lot easier on me and on my mind because Threshon stays after school for a tutoring program." When the bus brings Threshon home, it is about the same time that her mother is getting home from work. They both like their new arrangement much better.

- Dorothy Brown has two children, LaTonya, age twelve, and Phillip, age seven, who take the bus to Payne Elementary School everyday. She says that having a bus come to the Budget is a "great idea because it is more safer, and easier on the kids and the parents." She says that the bus driver keeps the kids under control, so she doesn't have to worry about them. She adds that "the bus really helps me out because of the little PA I get." Ms. Brown expresses her concern that if there were not a bus, her children would not be able to go to school everyday because she can not afford to pay to send them.

- Susan Reddick also has two children who take the school bus -- Thomas, age eight, and Sonya, age nine. She says that having a bus come to pick up her children is "very convenient and saves a lot of time." She adds that she doesn't worry about them and whether or not they made it school. Ms. Reddick says that before the bus program her children had to miss school at least once a week because she did not have a way for them to get to school. She would walk them to school, but it bothered her that her children always complained of being tired. Now, Ms. Reddick's children come home from school on the bus and play with their friends, which makes her happy.

• Sandra Bostick says that having a bus has made her life a lot easier because she used to have to get her daughter LaKeisha up two hours before school. LaKeisha had to transfer twice to get to Friendship Elementary School in southeast Washington. Now, it only takes 25 minutes for LaKeisha to get to school. And, special provisions have been made for the four children who are last to be dropped off to eat breakfast on the bus because they were getting to school after breakfast was served. LaKeisha, age twelve, says she likes taking the bus much better because she rides with her friends and doesn't have to get up so early.

• Ann Splaine says that the bus program is "excellent because otherwise Nicole couldn't get to school." Nicole, a six year old, attends first grade at Webb Elementary School. Unfortunately, she has to repeat first grade because she missed the first five months of school before there was a bus to take her to school. Ms. Splaine says, "there was no way for Nicole to get to school because I didn't have money to get her there; I didn't want her walking alone because she's too young, and since I'm in a wheel chair, I couldn't go with her." Since the bus started coming to the Budget Inn, Nicole has gone to school everyday. Nicole says that she likes the bus because she likes being able to go to school everyday.

• Jacqueline Warren, mother of Montez, age ten, and Nina, age seven, says that before the bus started coming to the Budget Inn, her children "had to miss a lot of school... but, now they go regularly." She says that having a bus has helped ease her tight finances "because I don't have to worry about fare for the bus... and whether or not I have it." Nina and Montez both attend Gibbs Elementary School in northeast Washington. Nina says that riding the bus is fun and adds, "I like it... it's a ride."

• Vickie Willis, a ten year old who attends Gage Elementary School, says that she likes riding the bus because the Metro bus takes too long to get to school. Also, she says that now she gets to school on time and eats breakfast there with her friends. When she used to take public transportation, she would invariably be too late to eat breakfast at school.

• Corey Edwards, an eight year old who attends Gibbs Elementary School in northeast Washington says he likes taking the bus and thinks "it's a lot better than walking." Myrtle Edwards, his mother, says that she usually did not have the money to pay for bus fare, so they would walk to school together. It took about an hour to get to school. Ms. Edwards says the morning walk was nice, but walking home from school always made Corey tired. She says, "After walking home, all he wanted to do was eat and sleep." She says that now that there is a school bus and he doesn't have to walk home from school, Corey plays with his friends at night. She is thankful there is a bus because she says, "it's real important to go to school" and get an education.

• Sheila Holmes says that it was hard to get her daughter Shavon, age eleven, to school before the bus program. She used to pay for tokens for her daughter to get to Kimball Elementary School in southeast Washington and says "now it's a lot easier because sometimes I didn't have the money (for the tokens) or I ran out of tokens." When that happened, Shavon would have to stay home, but "now she goes everyday." Ms. Holmes adds, "I think that it's important to have buses for all the shelters" because all homeless children need a good education. Shavon says that she likes the bus because she gets to school on time, she rides with her friends, it allows her more free time and mainly because she likes school and doesn't want to miss anymore.

• Roslyn Carrol is a nine year old student at Shed Elementary. She likes taking the bus because she "gets to go to school everyday now." Her mother Patricia Melton says that before the bus started coming to the Budget Inn, "Roslyn had to miss a lot of school, but she's not missing anymore. She likes school." Ms. Melton often had to borrow money to pay for bus fare for her daughter to get to school. She says that "it's important [that the buses keep coming] because they [homeless children] need to be able to go to school." She, too, stressed the importance of an education for her daughter, Roslyn, and how glad she was that she could get to school regularly now.

• Quenisha Hollowell, age six, says that she "likes the bus because it's fun." She rides to Syphax Elementary School in southwest Washington with all her friends and says that "it's even better than when my Mom used to take me to school on the big bus." Her mother Meagan Hollowell says that having a bus come to the Budget Inn has made her life a lot easier. She explained that she used to have to ride with her daughter to school everyday and then back to the shelter, twice a day, because she did not think it was safe for a six year old to ride public transportation alone. With the innocence of a six year old, but understanding the gravity of the situation, Quenisha pleaded, "Please don't take our school bus away."